



## Bellwether Magazine

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# Early Days

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## Early Days By David A. Meirs II, V.M.D., V'54

Our class ('54) was probably the last class to visit Bolton Farm, near Bristol. We went there as freshman in the spring on 1951, primarily to learn how to caponize chickens. This farm was later sold for development and the proceeds used to purchase New Bolton in Chester County.

I have a number of memories of New Bolton Center. Unfortunately only a few of these have anything to do with veterinary medicine. In the early years New Bolton Center bore almost no resemblance to what it later became. The school did not wish to offend neighboring private practitioners by becoming a competitor so the only cases we got were referrals. In fact I can only recall one such case, a horse with botulism. The horse was referred to New Bolton and remained recumbent until it expired or was put down a few days later. We students provided nursing care in shifts around the clock. Care consisted mostly of turning the animal from side to side at regular intervals.

What was later named the Allam House was our dormitory and cafeteria. There were not many other buildings. Aside from a functioning dairy herd of about 40 cows, there were few large animals there. Upon these we practiced passing stomach tubes and catheters, casting with ropes, etc. There was also a poultry necropsy facility in which we participated.

Dr. Raker had recently joined the faculty after several years in a mixed practice. He had yet to establish his world-class reputation as an equine surgeon. What limited equine surgeries the school did were still performed in Philadelphia. New Bolton did not even have a large animal surgery table!

Since there was so little to do, we passed the time playing very physical touch football on the Allam House lawn (Dr. Boucher was a terror)! Afternoons and evenings we read or played cards and/or drank prodigious quantities of beer and sang.

One day after lunch Dr. Raker appeared and

asked for any suggestions we might have for some meaningful activity that afternoon. Dairy was then my primary interest, and I asked if we could collect semen from the bull. Dr. Raker thought this a splendid idea so off the dairy we tramped. Here we learned about proper preparation of the artificial vagina (A.V.). Since this whole thing was my idea, I was assigned the honor of actually making the collection. Now although I was quite familiar with artificial insemination of cattle, I had never seen a bull breed. I had no idea with what alacrity the typical male bovine accomplishes this pleasant task. I positioned myself expectantly, A.V. in hand, at the proper slot along the chute just behind the cow. The bull tore down the chute like a rocket and brushed me out of the way as I stood there completely flabbergasted. He bred the cow in an instant and sauntered back to his pen, accompanied by gales of laughter from my classmates.

## New Bolton Center – Thoughts from the First Class By Jefferies Hathaway, V'53

New Bolton in the fall of 1952 was pastoral and pristine depending on your upbringing. To those of agrarian setting, it was pastoral to a fault, to those of urban lineage, pristine beyond comprehension. What is now dubbed "Allam House" was the focal point of first impression. There was little else. A barn to the rear with a bit of an attachment that served as the poultry laboratory of the State of Pennsylvania, a small outbuilding to the left of the main entrance and to the right a home structure for the farm manager in residence. Then several miles to the rear another barn, which housed the resident cattle herd, recollection says, Guernseys. And many acres of prime Chester County farmland, yet to be properly assessed and/or developed, surrounded the whole estate.

Staffing such an enterprise must have been gargantuan for there were few bodies to spare. Funding has always been a problem at the University of Pennsylvania, and New Bolton was no exception. Dr. Tom DeMott served as the manager in residence and Dr. George Sperling held forth in the poultry lab. Occasional visits by Drs. Boucher and Laudenslager filled out our tutelage. There were our two field services led by Drs. Maurice Arnold and James McCahon who, in all honesty, were the only two preceptors to whom we had any real exposure. It was, possibly, from these two superior

clinicians from private practice that we received the bulk of our clinical experience, and on the road, one could say. When one mentions staff, it would be an oversight to not mention our secretary/receptionist, Mrs. Owens, long suffering she was, and those two delightful people who served as cooks and bottle washers, Mr. and Mrs. Claude Ellis.

Our formal education was derived from wildly driven trips with Drs. Arnold and McCahon, the occasional visits from Drs. Boucher and Bartenslager during which we ravaged the Guernseys at the nearby University barns with pregnancy exams to the point that these brave bovines bellowed blatantly as we approached. Dr. Charles Raker, a mere slip of a fellow in those days, would stop by to take us on a stable call, dipping down into "Chateau Country" of Delaware, since there were no horses here at that time. Much of the rest of our academic day was given to writing up the calls made on field service trips, and /or trips to the library to read, reread, and read again, the few books we were thoughtful enough to bring from Philadelphia.

Our informal education centered on daily chats with Dr. Sperling, (when it was determined that chickens weren't high on our list of endeavors [until too late, of course]). These chats involved the take over of Cuba by Fidel,

the McCarthy fiascoes, the probable beginning of the Eisenhower period, and whether the "Whiz Kids" were really over the hill. They were! Otherwise time was spent in winters with pinocle, bridge, and hearts in front of that fabulous walk-in fireplace, and in spring with chipping golf balls in the back lawn, with the occasional errant shot sent through a window of the office. Evenings would occasionally find us hard at play with shuffleboard at the "Tick Tock Club" between the lanes north of Kennett Square. What was really nice was that on the weekends our wives came out to visit. They were billeted in the same luxurious quarters that we occupied on the second floor of "Allam House." Many of us had never seen such opulent quarters as these! Walk-in closets with built-in drawers and cupboards. Marvelous!

And from these beginnings issued forth some of the finest and locally revered large animal practitioners ever to serve the farms of Pennsylvania, shirt and tie under the overalls, gum boots, pail and brush in hand. Ready and able! Witness these names: Earl Blackburn, Max Brubaker, Hugh Coleman, Amos Hollister, Harold Landis, Elmer Marx, Earl Neuffer, Bob Probasco, Sam Rice and Jim Thompson. Pennsylvanians!

*Presented by and for the Class of 1953, fiftieth reunion next year, 2003.*